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Chairman Towns Opens Inquiry into Quality of Troops' Body Armor and Vehicle Safety

WASHINGTON – Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) is asking Secretary of Defense Robert Gates for explanations about management of the Department of Defense’s (DoD) troop armor procurement and testing programs. The inquiry follows a DoD Inspector General (IG) report issued recently that identified problems with the Army’s body and vehicle armor testing process. Since the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq began, DOD has consistently struggled to deploy safe and reliable body armor to troops on the front line, and the IG has [issued several reports](#) outlining the challenges to DOD’s armor procurement policies and potential solutions. Chairman Towns, an Army veteran, is committed to ensuring the safety of our troops.

“For almost a decade, our troops have sacrificed life and limb to defend our nation. At the same time, DoD has repeatedly struggled to manage its programs and testing related to protective armor, including body armor,” said Chairman Towns. “If we are going to continue sending troops into harms way, we must know that DoD is doing all it can to provide effective and save body armor and armored vehicles.”

A January 2009 DoD IG report identified problems with the U.S. Army's testing processes. The IG found, among other things, that testing of some body armor was not consistently conducted in accordance with contract requirements—and that body armor that was recorded as having passed testing had actually failed. A separate review of body armor testing by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) the Army did not follow established testing protocols, did not maintain certain internal controls, and recommended an independent assessment of armor test results.

The letter from Chairman Towns to Secretary Gates is the latest in a series of inquiries from the House Oversight Committee into Federal procurement and waste, fraud and abuse of taxpayer dollars. In the letter to Gates, Chairman Towns requested that DoD brief the House Oversight Committee on the Department's efforts to ensure that our troops have effective and safe body armor and armored vehicles, as expeditiously as possible.

Specifically, the Chairman requested an overview of key ongoing armored vehicle and body armor acquisition programs of the Services, including the Army's Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicle program (MRAP); contractors involved in the maintenance or procurement of body armor or armored vehicles; and field experience with the effectiveness of protective armor, including body armor, along with any analysis comparing experience in the field with the results of laboratory testing.

"I am aware that DoD has made some progress addressing past problems with the body and vehicle armor provided to our armed services," said Chairman Towns. "However, I want to make sure DoD's progress continues. There is nothing more important than providing our troops with the best protection possible."

The full text of the letter from Chairman Towns to Secretary Gates is below.

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Documents and Links

[Letter from Chairman Edolphus Towns to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates](#)